

FOREST & BLUFF

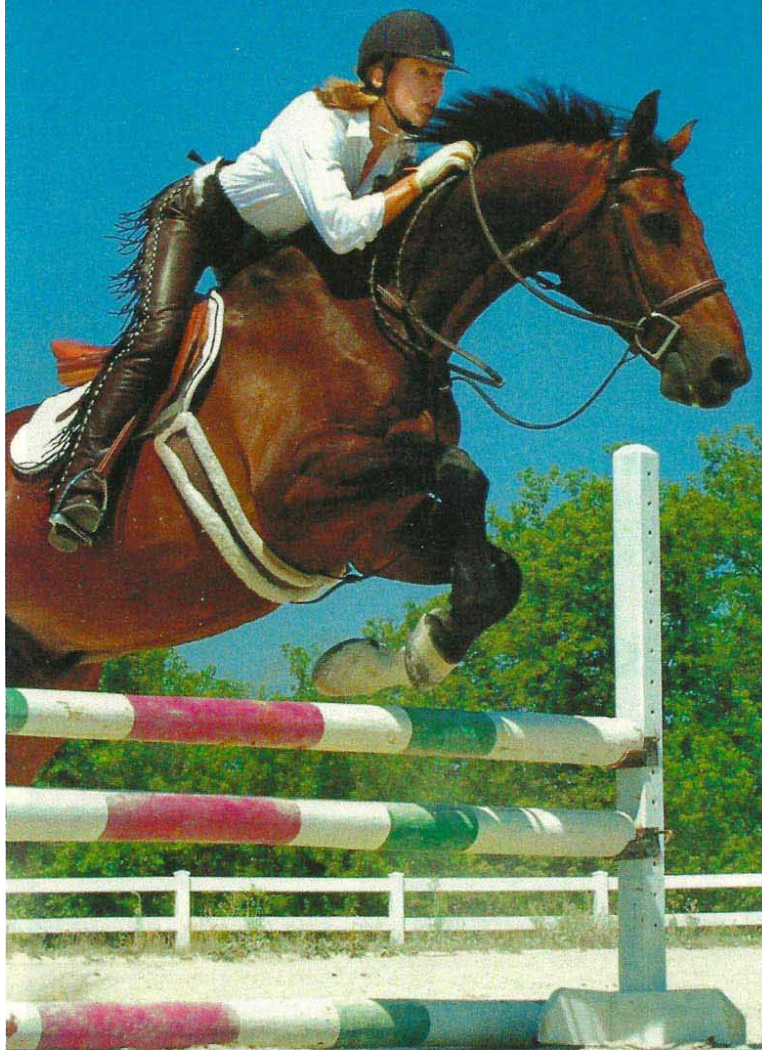
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KANDIS WRIGLEY FLANKS
BHUTAN AND STRONG

LADY AND THE PRANCE



PHOTOGRAPHED BY DANIEL KULLMAN TEXT BY BOBBI GROOVER

KANDIS WRIGLEY AND BHUTAN: POETRY IN MOTION

A FAMOUS MAN ONCE COMMENTED about the worth of a good horse for the well-being of a man. Since then it has been extended and applied to women to read: There is nothing better for the inside of a woman than the outside of a horse. To those women who possess a passion for equines, the best friend in their lives is not two-footed but four-footed with soft, bewhiskered lips and gentle, kind eyes. "Horsepower" to this special breed of women doesn't mean belts and bolts that rumble and roar under a hood to zoom around the highways. These women zoom all right but to them "horsepower" is the power of these wondrous, magnificent animals to stir passion within the heart, to gallop through dreams, to fly over fences and to experience dancing with a partner whose only communication is by the language of trust and cues. For centuries, the profound kinship between equine and woman has bewildered many a man, caused them to scratch their heads in confusion and finally shrug their shoulders in resignation. The need to be close to their horses nearly borders on obsession, a compulsion to capture and savor the magic. "Horsepower" means love and admiration coupled with trust and respect for a thousand pound beast. It is a passion for the living, breathing creature; one either possesses it or not.

This writer is soundly ensconced in the first category. I'm told my first spoken words were not "Mama & Dada" but "show pony...show pony." Though I never had the pleasure of owning a horse in my youth—Mom was terrified of them!—I rode whatever four legs and a tail I could beg for or borrow. I was hooked and determined. When my husband, Ken, asked me to marry him, I asked if he'd buy me a horse. When he said yes, so did I! Since that day, I've known the joys and sorrows (I recently lost my longtime hunter) inherited with the passion of "horsepower." Having a Native American (Lenape) just a few great grandmothers in my past, I inherited my love of horses from the women in my ancestry. Horses are named characters in all of my novels and play significant roles in the plot line mainly because horses have always been part of the family. My grandmother owned five horses, and my father's whole family rode. Ironically, two of my horses came to me with the same names as two of my grandmother's horses, Ginger and Reds. Horse history in the making; "horsepower" continued. My chestnut thoroughbred, Cinnabun, keeps me on my toes because he jumps with amazing bounce for every ounce, hence his barn name, Bounce.

During the past twenty-some years of horse ownership and responsibility, I have treasured the love and trust of several equines and the mounted company of my husband and two sons in the show ring, in the hunt field and on riding vacations. It's been rumored that while cantering four abreast, my family and I have often been heard belting out the theme song from Bonanza. Psst—it's not a rumor; it's one of many picture-perfect moments born through the passion of "horsepower."

Lest everyone think that this writer is in the minority, here is a small sample of

other 'personalities' who also adore the 'equalities' of these gentle giants. Kandis Wrigley has always loved horses. Every Christmas and birthday she hoped for one but her parents weren't convinced. Then, eleven years ago, she seized the opportunity and leased a chestnut mare named Belle. That relationship was an auspicious beginning. "It's been crash course over the past decade but each horse teaches something and makes you better as a rider. Each day is something new and different. I ride intensely and show intensely; it's my passion." Kandis rides with Prairie Star. They train her and her horses, and it is the group through which she shows. Since her horses play an important role in her life, Kandis gives great thought to their names. Her bay, warmblood gelding she named Bhutan after the Kingdom of Bhutan that is nestled in the eastern Himalayas ("He's as big as a mountain.") in southern Asia between China and India. The name translates to "Land of the Thunder Dragon" yet the Kingdom of Bhutan is mesmerizing and awesome. Since Bhutan, himself, has an awesome presence and mesmerizes spectators as he thunders around the show ring, the name is most appropriate for this handsome equine.

Also keeping her busy is Kandis' ten-year-old grey thoroughbred, Shambala, named after a special place that represents, "tranquility, peace, calm and a sense of escape." Since her horses are Kandis' therapy, Shambala is also aptly named. Kandis describes riding and showing as a "soulful experience" and an "inspiration" because "nothing can replace having a fabulous time with your horse." Unless, of course, one is having a fabulous time with one's horse and one's daughter. Kandis is able to stay focused while competing as she switches gears from rider to horse-show-mom and enjoys watching daughter, Kristen, show her pony. "It's an intensely neat thing to do together." In this instance, the torch of "horsepower" is passed from mother to daughter.

The torch was also passed to Debbie Nieto. She has wonderful childhood memories of riding horses with her mother at Elmer J. Holdorf's near Golf and Harms. It was a mother-daughter bonding experience long before someone coined the phrase. Horses were in her blood for several reasons: her uncle was a well-known handicapper at many of the famous racetracks, and her mother experienced the thrill of sitting on the great racehorse, Man O' War—a note that Debbie offers with pride. "I grew up at the race track. At one point, I was offered a job at Arlington Park exercising the racehorses at 3:00 a.m. but I didn't take it because I didn't have a way to get there at that hour." The summer she was fifteen, Debbie saved every penny she earned to lease a horse for two

weeks. It was heaven—for those few weeks, she had a horse of her very own. "I hung around the barn all day, helping other people with saddling and shoveling. I was totally into horses." Then life intervened, and she had to put her passion on hold for a number of years. When she had the money to buy her own horse, there was no time because of work and family.

In 1981 Debbie and her husband opened the award-winning restaurant, Carlos',



SEVEN-YEAR-OLD CHRIISA ALGHINI WAS BORN WITH THE PASSION OF "HORSEPOWER"

in Highwood. Ironically, the work which had kept her from horses would now offer her an opportunity to return. Friends of Debbie's came to eat at Carlos' and she found out they had just built a stable. She saw stars and soon owned, Sly, a sweet bay mare named, Slight Indulgence. "With my job, however, I showed on what I called the 'working housewife circuit'. Weekends were the busiest time in our business and, of course, the shows were on the weekends so I had to show close to home." Family, career and "horsepower"—Debbie made it all work. When Sly was retired with her original owner, Debbie searched long and hard to find her new love, Vah-Zeé, another thoroughbred mare. "I knew the rule of thumb—pretty is as pretty does—but I was praying she worked out because I loved her at first sight." She and Vah-Zeé were inseparable show partners for the next fifteen years until Vah-Zeé was retired. "I've been lucky enough to have

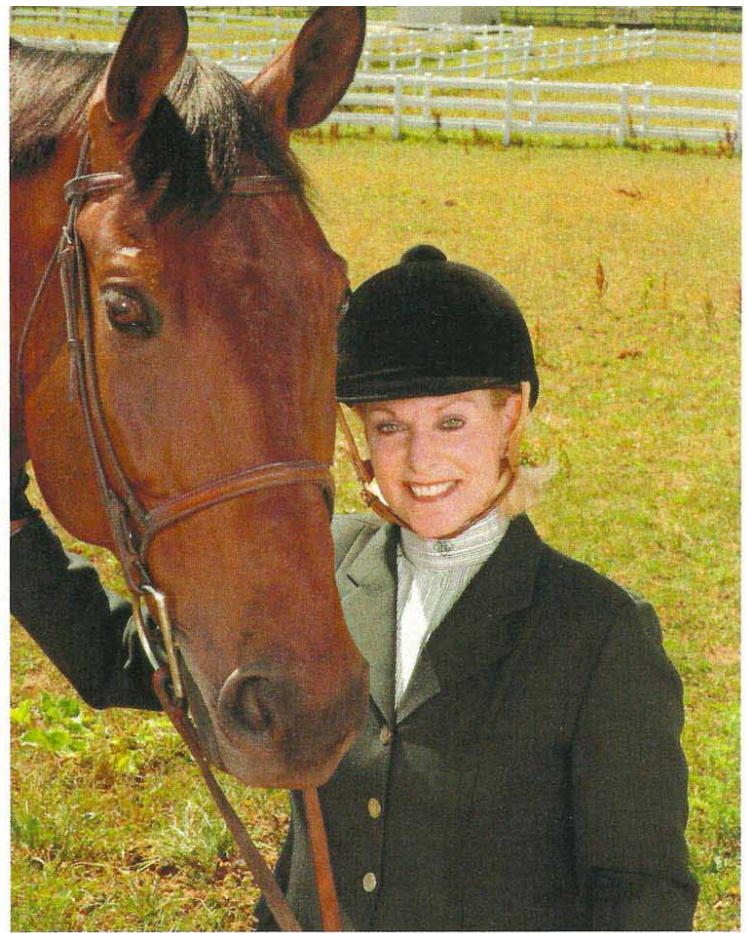
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good balance in life. I ride during the day and work at night.” Today her new equine love is Bravo. “He was just five, a thoroughbred off the track when I acquired my first gelding. His last race was Sunday, and I bought him Thursday; his racing plates were still on. What was I thinking, you ask? I wasn’t. But my trainers worked with me and made this horse what he is today, three years later. He floats; he just goes.” Working full time with her husband, Carlos, and their son, Adam, keeps Debbie fulfilled in family and career, but it is her days with Bravo that somehow keep it all in perspective.

Akin to a spontaneous combustion, the passion of “horsepower” sometimes just ignites at birth. Seven-year-old Christina Alghini—Chrissa to family and friends—is proof that the passion spontaneously continues generation after generation. Chrissa was born with it. She has wanted a pony since the day she knew what they were. In fact, she asks for a pony for every birthday. She and her sister, Ashley, play “horse” frequently, crawling around the floor on all fours. “Sometimes Ashley tries to ride on my back but I buck her off.” Her mother feeds her carrots although Chrissa prefers her carrots with ranch dressing.

Her mother first took notice of her daughter’s passion when they were invited to a birthday party. “There were lots of games, a moon walk and pony rides. Most of the kids played in the moon walk but Chrissa kept standing in line for the ponies. She even learned all their names so she could ride each one several times. Then she rode Ginger, a pony belonging to one of my friends, and I realized that Chrissa had a true love of the animal and the sport.”

Now Chrissa rides at Pferde Farm. She keeps a binder with all her notes about horses—breeds, colors, anatomy—as well as information about the saddles, bridles, surcingles and side reins. Her notes also include the do’s and don’t’s about horses and barns. She is learning about horses from the ground up, or perhaps from the hooves up. In addition to riding she helps brush, tack and feed the pony she is assigned in any particular lesson. “I started riding with Gaby but now I ride Whitey, a very special Welsh pony; he’s grey. So far we mostly trot and play games like ‘around the world’ but I want to canter and jump and show.” Jenifer, Chrissa’s mother, says Chrissa enjoys the challenges that the riding brings because she has no fear of the animals. “I’ve noticed a tremendous boost in her confidence. Chrissa loves to be ‘hands-on’ at the barn. Me? I try not to get dirty.” During camp this energetic youngster will take lessons everyday, bring-



DEBBIE NIETO AND HER EQUINE LOVE, BRAVO

ing her that much closer to her goal. She doesn’t mind picking hooves and brushing the ponies because she thinks that’s part of letting them know you love them. “If my pony was sick, I’d stay up all night with him to make him feel better.” In for a penny; in for a pound. Yep, Chrissa has the passion, hands down. Different personalities, different horses, different disciplines yet all have the passion to “dance equinallity, prance equinallity, take a chance on equinallity, not look askance at equinallity.” All of them gladly take liberty with a song Marilyn Monroe once sang about her diamonds: At his barn or her barn, equines don’t lose their charm. Horses are a girl’s best friend. Ah, the passion of “horsepower”—priceless. **F&B**

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